

JULY 5, 1984

Small bunches of cattle and a few strings of sheep are moving across the Shortgrass Country to the new grass on the Western boundaries. Floods and floodlets have revived some Pecos River country and the Big Bend. Herders out there, we are told, have rediscovered their talents of propping up creek bed water gaps.

Grass conditions in this neighborhood are scattered and delicate. Every pasture and trap seems different. Two days ago, for example, my neighbors reported rain that ran from a royal 3 inches to the kind that barely leaves drop marks in the dry ground.

What they are turning in is the truth. We are all so close to going over the dry brink of disaster that no one dares to violate any of the Commandments. In fact if a general rain doesn't fall in our parts by fall, I look for a spiritual revival that'll make some of those biblical marches to the sea shores sound like the leaders were wearing rawhide hobbles.

Though it's been two days from the time of this writing since the rains, I haven't converted our measurements yet. Starting the first of June, I've changed all our gauges from the standard tenth measurement to six-tenths of an inch. I got onto the idea years ago by discovering that a good way to measure the moon was to use the smaller fractions instead of using quarters and halves.

Of course being precise about lunar matters is difficult. Anything that I've ever known of that was connected to love songs and mating dances was impossible to be made sensible. I suspect that about the time you'd get folks to understand what a 13-16ths moon was, some tune-slick song writer would come along looking for the words to rhyme with a half shot over Miami, or a double take from Kokomo and mess up the whole thought pattern.

However, so far, I like the new standard. I've had to do my gauge calibrating with well water but once I work it out I think we'll be able to measure those teasers that make up such a large amount of our rainfall.

One obstacle that can't be changed is that people out of the Southwest never have been able to understand how we could celebrate rain in tenths and hundredths of inches. You can't expect some coastal hombre that only spends about six hours of the year outside of a raincoat to know what it's like to live in a desert. Nor can you tell a fellow who has never seen anything smaller than a twenty dollar bill how to keep your books on the back of a demand note for the length of your business lifetime. Catching rain samples in eye droppers won't change that block. You have to live here to understand that characteristic.

Now I'm not saying we don't know that measuring rain in tenths isn't a bad sign. A long time ago I advised my children to avoid settling in an area that kept up with the rain in tenths or hundredths of inches.

If the rainfall is that short, the best investment around the place is going to be at the ticket office at the airport. Living in a spot that dry is like going around with people that carry money clips, or guys that know the exact change they have in their front pants pockets. In either case, the rolling is going to be high and mighty, but for sure he's going to be broke by midnight.

Been quite a number of us fail at trying to ranch on widely scattered, hit-and-miss thundershowers. But the livestock business has to have hombres like us that'll hold until there aren't six blades of grass left this side of the Sierra Madre Mountains. We are the breed that gives the industry the reputation for tenacity. But like the heartsick song writers, we are also the segment that often misses reality.